difficulty discharging these duties, for, nobles aside, the Mossi usually obeyed orders from their chiefs—a fact verified by most observers. At the same time, a district chief had to be temperate in his demands upon his villagers, and could not take advantage of his obligations to the Mogho Naba as a means of personal enrichment. Similarly, the district administrators could not seek personal gain either by augmenting the demands of the district chief or by withholding part of the goods and services rendered to him. District administrators who were found guilty of maladministration or embezzlement were executed, because activities of this kind could—and often did—jeopardize the life of the district chief.

The Mossi might complain among themselves about the administrative policies of their district chief, but they took no measures against him unless he was very cruel or exploitative. A district chief who by his disregard for the people's welfare was believed to have lost the ability to "command people" jeopardized not only his position but also his life. When the people were dissatisfied with a chief, they either boycotted him or deserted their villages and migrated to another district, thus "increasing the force" (nam) of the chief who gave them sanctuary. This placed the deserted chief in a rather difficult position. Mogho Nanamse are known to have ordered the execution of district chiefs and even autonomous Dimdamba who had lost their subjects through their own fault. In 1863, when Mogho Naba Sanum was informed that the ruler of Boussouma, Naba Zande, had been chased away by his subjects for administrative abuses and had fled to a Ouagadougou village, he had him captured and executed.[29] Thus, the threat that people might leave the district was often strong enough to ensure a just administration, because the district chiefs and officials depended upon the villagers not only for the economic support of the central administration but also for their livelihood and their lives.

Those district chiefs who supervised other district chiefs for the Mogho Naba did not interfere with the internal administration of the districts. The chiefs of the Vooko and Nobila districts, for instance, had administrators of their own to look after their villages. But they were responsible to the chief of Nobere district, not their respective provincial ministers, for their internal affairs. Moreover, they had to follow the Nobere chief when he went to Ouagadougou to pay homage and allegiance to the Mogho Naba. But aside from these prescriptions, the chiefs of these subordinate districts administered their territories in the same manner as the Nobere chief administered his own.

The Mossi village chief had no administrators of his own to help him with day-to-day affairs of his village. However, like the district chief, he

had a group of confidants who acted as an informal council. These men included senior members of his own lineage, elders from other local lineages, and personal friends. Again, like the confidants of the district chiefs, these men visited the village chief whenever they were not busy with their own affairs to talk to him about wives, crops, and village matters. Although protocol was at a minimum on this level, the chief had to maintain a high degree of decorum. As a member of the ruling lineage of the district, he had noble status and had to be treated accordingly. The non-noble village chief was also respected as a recipient of the nam. But all chiefs, whether nobles or commoners, were expected to lead exemplary lives lest the flaws in their characters as revealed by the intimacy of village life should weaken their prestige.

The village chief received his orders from the district chief through the administrator in charge of his village or through one of this official's servants. He, in turn, used his own sons or relatives to transmit messages to the heads of the saghse. If the message was extremely important, the village chief's messenger might be accompanied by the administrator's messenger or by the district chief's personal representatives. The saksobadamba then transmitted the order to the various compound heads. This hierarchy was always followed because, by following it, the officials knew who was responsible for disobeying or frustrating the wishes of the superior chiefs. As on the district level, the orders transmitted to the village and its sections dealt with such things as collecting tribute, picking fruits from the district chief's trees, allocating labor for the district chief or his personal retainers, transferring or summoning cases to the district court, procuring sacrificial animals for the local Tengsoba, and requesting soldiers. The village chief also sent his own messages to the saghse. These messages, however, dealt with such village matters as local sacrifices, quarrels, and court cases.

Misrule and maladministration by a village chief were punished either by the district chief or by the villagers. Like other Mossi rulers, the village chief could not be deposed and allowed to live. However, he had a better chance of fleeing and finding refuge in another district. His presence in a strange district did not challenge the authority of the local chief, and he had no opportunities to seize any of his host's villages. In fact, if the refugee was accompanied by a large number of his subjects, his host might even give him land on which to erect a new village. The proviso was, of course, that he should not "spoil" the district by causing trouble. If a village chief accused of maladministration was seized by the district chief before he could flee, he was invariably executed. If he was a commoner, he was decapitated or even stoned to death; if he was a nobleman, he was taken into the bush and strangled in secret by the district police.